

September 5, 2002

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA) introduced the “Chance to Succeed Act,” legislation aimed at helping disabled Americans and those confronted with major barriers to employment move from welfare to work. Rep. Stark is joined in his effort by 43 cosigners in the House. Senators Wellstone and Kennedy have introduced companion legislation, S. 2610, in the Senate.

Rep. Stark’s legislation creates broad new guidelines for states to better serve the needs of the disabled and severely disadvantaged. It empowers states to improve employment opportunity for welfare recipients with physical and mental disabilities. It also requires States to focus on other proven barriers to employment, such as low levels of education, limited English proficiency, and domestic abuse among others.

“Too many Americans find themselves trapped on welfare because of a disability,” Rep. Stark said. “Others are simply ill-equipped to overcome very real barriers that stand in the way of achieving meaningful employment. In either case, making welfare-to-work a reality means providing states with the tools and flexibility they need to give these Americans a fighting chance to succeed.”

Stark’s bill requires states to institute new screening and assessment programs that identify and provide specialized services to these recipients. It encourages them to create “personal responsibility plans” that outline goals necessary for each individual to obtain stable employment. It provides funding for state advisory panels to evaluate and improve these efforts. And it allows States to follow through with this process without being penalized under current Federal work requirements.

Several studies, including a recent General Accounting Office (GAO) study, show that bold, new efforts are needed to lift barriers that hinder the ability of welfare recipients to move from welfare to work.

- * The GAO reports that welfare recipients with disabilities are half as likely than people without disabilities to leave welfare.

- * An Urban Institute study found that 46% of welfare recipients that return to welfare were in poor mental or physical condition. Another 38% that returned to welfare had less than a high school education.

- * A Wisconsin study found that 30% of respondents in a recent survey of welfare recipients said that they had been fired because they suffered from domestic abuse.

“The facts clearly show that we aren’t doing enough to tear down barriers to success and make opportunity available to those individuals and families struggling to lift themselves out of poverty,” Stark said. “We can’t rightly demand that welfare recipients work and then ignore the barriers that make stable employment for many Americans unachievable.”

The “Chance to Succeed Act” has the support of nearly 50 social advocacy and religious groups representing children, the disabled and the poor.

“This bill is an attempt to respond to the inadequacies of this year’s Republican sponsored welfare bill,” Stark concluded. “It counters the phony Republican rhetoric by restoring needed compassion and common sense to welfare reform. It gives States what they need: real muscle to genuinely make a difference in the lives of poor families.”

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